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Viewpoint - by R. Moore.

I'm bothered about ~~of~~ Christmas nowadays in Guyana; and what bothers me is the vicious expensiveness of it all. Over the last ten years or so the cost of living in this country has mounted rapidly - leaving incomes and salaries trying breathlessly to keep up with it. But the high cost of living is as nothing compared with the high cost of Christmas. It seems impossible nowadays to have good-chen or good-will unless one spends vast sums of money to induce them.

Of course, when you see people shopping almost in thousands with eager, enthusiastic faces and a complete financial non-chalance you may be driven to the conclusion that these happy folk are not feeling the pinch. But talk to many of them privately - that is, when the Joneses are not around. Then you discover that they do feel the strain - Christmas does involve

too many heavy commitments - they really wish the whole process could be toned down - But - "well, you know, as long as other people are doing it there is no option but to do it oneself."

And there's the rub. Cause and effect work in a vicious circle. We watch our neighbours returning from town laden with ~~loads~~ quantities of Christmas fare - their children holding intricate and expensive gadgets. And we say "Oh no they can't buy or are" so damn we go to equal them. And when we return they compare notes and decide that we must not get past them - And so it goes on. In fact you can say that at Christmas time this business of keeping up with the Joneses is at its very worst. After all if the proposition that all men are created equal is true - then my neighbour must simply not entertain more lavishly

than I.

What is worse, business encourages this sort of thing. I am not blaming when I say that Christmas is a heaven-sent gift for business-men. The newspapers and the radio are overloaded what you ~~must~~ cannot do without if your Christmas is going to be just right. And what you must have is fairly expensive stuff. Whenever I see the word simple in an advertisement I get suspicious - A home simply decorated, A simple Christmas meal or simple entertainment - all these beautiful simplicities cost a great deal more than the ordinary simple ones can afford.

And then you see, our ideas of Christmas are, as someone has been remarking recently, far too North American. But not merely because we use North American Decorations - but rather because we imitate the boundaries and almost

wasteful nature of North American spending on an economy that is particularly unbalanced.

And this brings us to the heart of the matter. This is a poor country or a polite usage or underdeveloped one. Many people are already living beyond their means and cannot really afford this terrific spending spree at Christmas. It is not uncommon to find that the salaries of January, February and even March are — one can almost say — mortgaged beforehand for Christmas. Is it really any sense in having a gloriously irresponsible time at Christmas — and then living in ~~the~~ a financial limbo for three months of the year. People don't build nations like this. The economists are constantly telling us that saving is a sine qua non for progress in underdeveloped countries. But like St. Augustine

who prayed for charity but not just
yet - we want to save - but not just
now.

Everybody excuses this sort of
behaviour by saying "Oh but you
enjoy a fire - it's part of our national
culture - our way of life". Perhaps!
- being constantly in need of debt,
not being able to own one's house -
with very little ^{or no} money in the bank -
our part of our national culture -
I wonder.

And the irony of it all is this -
the most common and perhaps
symbol of Christmas is a symbol
of poverty - a stable. But the
most common expression of it
in this country is a spurge of
non-existent affluence.